TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

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In the Tiny Footprints of Todd Gitlin...

Those Pesky Sixties!

By Alexander Cockburn

Gerard DeGroot: *The 60s Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade.* MacMillan: 2008, 508 pp.

DeGroot, U.S.-born in 1955 and now a professor of history at the University of St Andrew's, aims to rid the Sixties decade of its revolutionary and romantic pretensions. Off the wall comes Korda's photo of Che, and the Situationist poster from the May-June days in Paris. Out goes a decade as sweet in the memory of many as a winsome hippy maiden fragrant with patchouli oil, "Tambourine Man" on the turntable, Klimt's "Judith and Holofernes" on the wall, gauzy scarf over the bedside lamp, and *The Glass Bead Game* open on the pillow. Welcome, instead, the peremptory bark of the revisionist tour guide shoving his party round the exhibits.

DeGroot wants to refocus the past: "We remember the Students for a Democratic Society but forget the Young Americans for Freedom. We recall Che Guevara's success in Cuba but not his humiliation in Bolivia." The period, DeGroot writes, is "unfortunately, a collection of beliefs zealously guarded by those keen to protect something sacred" from corrosion by "rebel analysts," among whom DeGroot numbers himself. These rebels are dismissed, he laments, as "reactionary, revisionist, or neoconservative."

DeGroot's antidote is what he accurately bills as "an impressionistic wandering through the landscape of a disorderly decade." As he rushes us along, familiar landmarks flash past, like photos glimpsed for an instant from a moving stairway. Here, in the "premonitions" section, is Ginsberg reading "Howl," the pill being invented in Worcester, Mass.,

COCKBURN CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

The Story of Gen. Petraeus' Deception and How It Easily Duped the Press and Congress

By Gareth Porter

Throughout 2007 and 2008, Gen. David Petraeus successfully directed the development of a propaganda scenario portraying a fierce struggle for Iraq between shadowy figures in Iran, fueling "proxy war" against the United States through its support for "special groups," and U.S. forces working to roll up those Iranian-sponsored networks.

That story line was extraordinarily useful to the Bush administration – or, more precisely, to the Bush-Cheney White House and the U.S. military command in Iraq. It served three distinct purposes simultaneously. First, it provided a new rationale for U.S. occupation in Iraq that promised to stretch years into the future – fighting Shiite foes, which were supposedly sponsored by Iran. As al Qaeda's power seemed to fade during 2007, that purpose filled what would otherwise have been a void in regard to reasons for a continued U.S. military role in the country.

Second, the assertion of Iranian troublemaking in Iraq provided a rationale for the limited attack on Iranian bases, which was Dick Cheney's ambition, and, thus, for a possible trigger for an Iranian response that could justify an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

But it also serves to divert attention from the embarrassing fact that the Bush administration and Iran have been backing the same horse in Iraq. Since early 2005, Iranian strategy has been centered on support for Shiite-dominated regime in Baghdad, because those governments were led by and dependent on the political support of loyal Iraqi agents of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the time the IRGC had created the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Dawa Party in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. The Baghdad regime, therefore, represents a joint U.S.-Iranian condominium.

The "proxy war" propaganda claim has revolved around one central lie, which is that Iran has used "special groups," meaning militia groups that have broken away from Sadr, to try to force the United States out of Iraq and destabilize the Iraqi regime. The term "special groups" itself was invented not by Iran but by the U.S. military, according to Ned Parker of the *Los Angeles Times*, who has covered the Mahdi Army closely. Parker told me in a telephone interview in May 2008, "It seems the purpose of the term is to distinguish within the Mahdi Army between those they can work with and those they can't." Parker believes this is "the useful effect of the term."

Other terms used by the U.S. military for Iran-backed breakaway Mahdi Army units – "rogue elements" and "criminal elements" – were equally deceptive. On his pro-war site, Bill Roggio reported in late February 2007 that "military and intelligence sources" privately dismissed the idea of "rogue elements" of the Mahdi Army. "The 'rogue element' narrative," Roggio explained, "provides Mahdi Army fighters and commanders an 'out'". He wrote, "They can choose to oppose the government and be targeted or step aside and join the political process."

In other words, the definition of a "special group" or "rogue element" had nothing to do with independence from Muqtada al-Sadr or links with Iran. It was simply a matter of whether the given unit was resisting or cooperating with the U.S. occupation.

The U.S. command has been remarkably stingy about providing evidence in

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Lumumba murdered in Katanga, Lady Chatterley on trial at the Old Bailey, with Lord Hailsham touchingly confiding in the House of Lords that before judging Chatterley and Mellers, he wanted to know "what sort of parents they became… I should have liked to know how Mellors would have survived living on Connie's rentier income of six hundred pounds…"

Round the museum we dash, from Sharpeville to the Bay of Pigs, to Margate (mods and rockers), to Muhammad Ali, to Mary Quant. Here, at the half-way mark, are the Black Panthers and Cesar Chavez, with the Tet offensive, just around the corner. Through '68 we scoot, past the Papal encyclical on contraception, past Altamont, Chappaquiddick and the Moon landing, and suddenly we're out again in the cool light of 2008, with a parting sniff from DeGroot that "by paying so much attention to what was happening on Maggie's Farm, we failed to notice the emergence of Maggie Thatcher."

DeGroot derides all the usual suspects – the anti-war movement, radical blacks, hippies – for sins of arrogance, self-aggrandizement, credulity, self-indulgence. He gets his teeth in Muhammad Ali's ankle and hangs on for a full eight pages, which contain comical sentences such as: "The day after Ali announced his conversion [to Islam] both the FBI and the Defense Department opened inquiries into his draft status. Given the close sequence, it is easy to conclude that Ali was being punished."

Yes, indeed, it's easy to reach that conclusion because it is obviously true. But DeGroot marches on, zealous to be fair to two government agencies obsessed with the menace of black insurgency and, indeed, complicit in the assassination of black leaders such as Fred Hampton. "The issue, however, is much more complicated than Ali worshipers seem to understand." The government, you see, was merely following established bureaucratic procedures. "To single him out as uniquely mistreated denigrates the experiences of those who suffered more."

Though he's unusually querulous and small-minded, DeGroot is scarcely a pioneer in the enterprise of Sixties revisionism.

What a weird foray into belittlement! Here's an extraordinary athlete who took his courageous opposition ("I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong") to a terrible war to the level of a direct challenge to the U.S. government, which cost his heavyweight crown and almost his career, plus a five-year prison sentence that hung over him from 1967 to 1971, till the U.S. Supreme Court upheld his "conscientious objector" status. All DeGroot can do is squawk that the government was doing its job, and that Ali's travails weren't unique, which no one has claimed anyway.

DeGroot's putdowns are all on this trivial, slapdash level. Having foolishly stated in his introduction that no one remembers Che Guevara's end in Bolivia, thus minimizing the enduring currency of the famous photograph (actually reprinted in his book) of the guerrilla leader dead on his stretcher surrounded by Bolivian soldiers, DeGroot writes that "it is easy to admire a peasant revolution from the safe refuse of an ivory tower." And just as easy, one might add, to inscribe such sarcasms in the tenured seclusion of the University of St Andrew's, without any apparent effort to do serious research into the Venceremos Brigades and kindred solidarity movements. As a historian, DeGroot repeatedly puts up a very poor show. His ignorant underestimate of the very great and progressive consequences of Cuba's activities in Africa, pioneered by Guevara, is a case in point.

Though he's unusually querulous and small-minded, DeGroot is scarcely a pioneer in the enterprise of Sixties revisionism. Year after year, these revisionists, such as Todd Gitlin, try to stuff the Sixties back in the box. If it truly was just another, not-so-remarkable decade, as DeGroot claims, the revisionists wouldn't keep flailing away. Deflation of the Sixties is always on the political and cultural agenda because the decade really was a revolutionary one. DeGroot somehow doesn't get this one big truth. In the United States, one can see its consequences on every side, from the vastly improved coffee and bread, to the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act, to the Native American insurgency, to the permanent attrition of respect suffered by government institutions such as the FBI and the CIA, whose exposure in *Ramparts* in 1967 DeGroot incomprehensibly overlooks. If it wasn't for the Sixties, opposition to the war in Iraq wouldn't be a respectable mainstream position in the United States. If it wasn't for the Sixties, Barack Obama would not be the Democratic nominee for the presidency, from which eminence he will, no doubt, be prompted to repeat his reproofs of its excesses. **CP**

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Why Life is Getting Harder for Most People
By Serge Halimi

Employees at all levels are worried about the cost of food. Low-paid workers and the elderly are reduced to sifting through supermarket rejects: the problem of purchasing power is destroying the credibility of governments everywhere. In France, Italy and Britain, the parties in power have been soundly defeated in local elections. In the United States, the Republican Party has lost three of its traditional strongholds since March,

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support of its line that Iran is supporting and manipulating breakaway groups. In fact, it has presented what it claimed was information on the topic from interrogations with prisoners only once. That was on July 2, 2007, when command spokesman, Gen. Kevin Bergner, on July 2, 2007, briefed reporters on two detainees who had been captured in March: Khais Khazali, who was supposedly in charge of the all "special groups" in Iraq, and Ali Musa Daqduq, a Hezbollah operative.

Bergner said that both detainees "state that senior leadership within the Qods Force knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack that killed five coalition soldiers." If both men had volunteered statements making precisely that point, it would have been a remarkable coincidence. But since Bergner provided no direct quotes from either prisoner, much less a transcript of the interrogations, it must be assumed that either similar statements were obtained from both by coercion or Bergner was giving an imaginative interpretation of their actual answers.

Bergner was really more interested in showing that Daqduq, as Hezbollah's agent in Iraq, was a surrogate for Iran in creating Iraqi Shiite groups that would be responsive to Iranian interests. He stated flatly that Daqduq was "tasked" by Iran to "organize the special groups in ways that mirrored how Hezbollah was organized in Lebanon."

But did Daqduq really say that he was in Iraq to "organize" Shiites, as Bergner claimed? Apparently not. U.S. command spokesman, Col. Donald Bacon, told Associated Press in an e-mail sent May 5, 2008, "Ali Mussa [sic] Daqduq confirmed Lebanese Hezbollah were providing training to Iraqi Special Group members in Iran and that his role was to assess the quality of training and make recommendations on how the training could be improved."

That far more definitive statement of what Daqduq had actually said under interrogation indicates that Bergner's claim that Daqduq was supposed to organize Shiite militias into "special groups" and then report on their operations was an exercise in creative interpretation by the Petraeus command, presumably with some help from the vice president's office.

The timing of Bergner's claims, which generated a large wave of uncritical press reporting of Petraeus' "special groups" line, was obviously directly related to Vice President Dick Cheney's arguing within the administration for air attacks on Qods Force bases in Iran. Cheney had proposed that such an attack should be launched if and when irrefutable evidence was found of Iranian interference, such as interception of weapons of militiamen returning from Iran. Bergner was serving up ammunition for Cheney to use in his battle against the Pentagon's resistance to that proposal.

The "proxy war" propaganda offensive by Petraeus has demonstrated impressive staying power in surviving potentially lethal challenges by reality. The first such reality shock came shortly after military briefers asserted flatly that the armor-piercing explosive formed projectiles (EFPs) must have been manufactured in Iran, because there was no evidence that they were being manufactured within Iraq itself. Within days, stories of discoveries of workshops for the manufacture of EFPs by U.S. troops in Iraq began to appear in U.S. newspapers.

The U.S. command has been remarkably stingy about providing evidence in support of its line that Iran is supporting and manipulating breakaway groups.

Just ten days after the military briefing, Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of ground force operations in Iraq, had to begin walking the official line back. In an interview with *NBC News*, he conceded that EFPs had "started to come from Iran," but that "some of the technologies" were "probably being constructed here. [i.e., in Iraq]."

Odierno was determined to save the EFP element of the propaganda story. The command's explosives expert, Maj. Marty Weber, was instructed to tell the *New York Times* that the EFPs that the command now admitted were being made in Iraq were "much less likely to pierce armor." That, too, was carefully worded deception. *NBC News* reporter Jane Arraf had earlier been told by senior U.S. military officials – who were apparently not part of the Petraeus propaganda machine – that EFPs made in Iraqi machine shops were, indeed, quite able to penetrate U.S. armor, even if the penetration made by less perfect versions "isn't as clean."

U.S. government officials quietly allowed the EFP story to recede during 2007, replacing it with a new subtheme of Iranian-supplied mortars and rockets. But, when an Arabic-speaking journalist challenged Bergner at his August 15 press briefing by observing that "anyone can… buy any weapon and sell it" in Iraq, Bergner quickly conceded, surprisingly, that "the mere presence of weapons in Iraq does not by itself say where they came from." He suggested that the real evidence of Iranian supply was "what we have learned from Ali Musa Daqduq."

A careful review of Bergner's presentation on Daqduq a few weeks earlier reveals that he made no reference to a specific claim by Daqduq that Iran was sending weapons to Shiite militias in Iraq. Bergner did not offer to let reporters see what Daqduq actually had to say on that subject.

Another fiction on which the Petraeus "proxy war" construct has depended is that Iran-backed militiamen were responsible for attacks on coalition forces. That fiction has been repeatedly shattered by the clear evidence that those attacks were being carried out by troops loyal to Sadr.

Despite high levels of attacks launched in Shiite zones during the summer of 2007, the fighting virtually ceased as soon as Sadr issued the ceasefire on August 27. This indicated that it had been waged by Mahdi Army fighters. The effect of the Sadr ceasefire was particularly dramatic on mortar and rocket attacks on the Green Zone and U.S. military headquarters last spring and summer, attacks which the U.S. command insisted were in line with Iranian policy. Immediately upon Sadr's ceasefire declaration, those attacks ended abruptly, demonstrating that the attacks had been carried out by Sadr's own Mahdi Army forces.

The same thing happened again last March and April in Basra. Both Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Gen. Petraeus insisted once again that the resistance to the government offensive in Basra was being carried by rogue elements, rather than by Sadr loyalists. But, after Sadr called for a ceasefire in Basra at

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the end of March, a "senior U.S. military official" conceded, "This one week spike in violence and subsequent decrease, it has everything to do with Sadr and his control over mainstream JAM [Jaysh al Mahdi, or Mahdi Army]."

After those embarrassments, Petraeus' "proxy war" propaganda campaign should been dismissed by the media and abandoned by the U.S. military. Nevertheless, it continues to be the dominant frame for the Bush administration's statements and mainstream press coverage of the continued U.S. assault on the Mahdi Army.

The Petraeus slant also survived public insistence by officials of the al-Maliki regime, after the Sadr ceasefire of August 2007, that Iran had actually been instrumental in prevailing on Sadr to order the Mahdi Army to unilaterally cease military resistance. That assertion must be understood in the context of the intensified campaign of military pressure against the Mahdi Army by the U.S. military and pro-Iranian militias in Iraqi government uniforms through the spring and summer.

The arguments that Iran was not fomenting militia violence were being made so persuasively by Iraqi officials, including Kurdish Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, who is by no means a client of the Iranians, that Condi Rice finally accepted it in late December. Rice's Iraq coordinator, David Satterfield, then declared that Sadr's ceasefire would not have been possible without "an Iranian policy decision."

The Pentagon and the U.S. military, however, never went along with the line introduced by the State Department, and it subsequently disappeared from view – an apparent victory for Dick Cheney and Petraeus in Washington's bureaucratic shadow war over policy toward Iran. Until Cheney leaves the White House, we can count on finding the "proxy war" woven into everything emanating from the administration and the military on Iraq. **CP**

Gareth Porter is an historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy. His most recent book is *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, published in paperback in 2006. He can be reached at porter.gareth50@gmail.com.

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Still Pushing Booze on the Indians After All These Years

By James G. Abourezk

White Clay, Nebraska, is a tiny village – population 24 – in the northwest corner of Nebraska. Despite its size, however, it boasts four liquor stores to serve its customers, most of whom come from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation just across the border in southwest South Dakota. White Clay's liquor stores are there to accommodate the Reservation's alcoholics, primarily because the Oglala Sioux Tribe has made illegal the sale or possession of liquor on the Reservation. A small amount of the beer, wine and whiskey sold to Indians is consumed in White Clay itself, with most of it being transported back to Pine Ridge by bootleggers, who then sell it to alcoholics living on the Reservation.

Clinton sold the pass; Cheney "didn't understand the legalities"

The story of White Clay whiskey peddlers selling alcoholic beverages to the Indians is only a continuation of one that began back in the 1800s.

In the 1850s, the U.S. Army tried, without success, to tame the Indian Tribes who objected – violently – to white settlers disturbing their lands in the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. When the U.S. Army found it could not defeat the Indians, the government decided to negotiate a treaty with them. The resulting 1858 Ft. Laramie Treaty signed by the U.S. government and the Sioux Indians set aside the western part of South Dakota as the Great Sioux Reservation, promising that the Indians would no longer be bothered by white settlers, who were cluttering up the Indians' land on their way to the West Coast. The Treaty also provided part of Wyoming and Montana as exclusive hunting grounds for the Indian Tribes in that area.

Not long after the Pine Ridge Agency, housing the Oglala Sioux Tribe, was established prior to 1882, white-owned stores began springing up on the Nebraska side of the border, selling guns, ammunition and, more importantly, whiskey. Valentine McGillicuddy, the U.S. government's agent in Pine Ridge at that time, described the white squatters as "undesirables," who "will endeavor to settle on the land" near Big White Clay Creek. McGillicuddy at that time suggested to the Chester Arthur administration the establishment of a 50-square-mile buffer zone along the Nebraska border as the only way to keep the undesirable whites – and their whiskey – away from the Indians.

It was a historical preview of what is happening today at White Clay. McGillicuddy then described to his superiors the destruction caused by the Indians' easy access to whiskey in White Clay, Nebraska. He related the story of an interpreter who fell off his horse while drunk, breaking his neck, as well as several instances of deaths resulting from drunken brawls, including the killing of an Indian named Gray Eyes and the wounding of his wife in April of 1880. Secretary of the Interior Kirkwood agreed with McGillicuddy's assessment of the situation, and, in January of 1882, he convinced President Chester A. Arthur to sign an Executive Order withdrawing

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sale of alchohol to the public a five by ten mile strip of land, situated just across the Dakota border in Nebraska, adding it to the Great Sioux Reservation.

McGillicuddy was able to report to his superiors that after establishment of the new Reservation boundary, there had been little or no trouble involving intoxicating liquor.

In 1889, Congress enacted new legislation, which included a proviso that mirrored President Arthur's Executive Order, holding that the 50-square mile tract was to be reserved, "only so long as it may be needed for the use and protection of the Indians receiving rations and annuities at the Pine Ridge Agency."

But, almost immediately, pressure by white settlers again began to build for a return of the reserved land to the public domain. The buffer zone continued until 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt was convinced by his Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William A. Jones, that the lands should be returned to the public domain, opening it for white settlement. Acceding to the request, President Roosevelt signed an Executive Order on January 25, 1904, which purported to accomplish what the white settlers wanted. Significantly, the 1904 Executive Order contained no findings by the president, nor did it contain any recitation that the tract was no longer needed for the "protection of the Indians receiving rations and annuities at the Pine Ridge Agency." Although these omissions made the Executive Order illegal, no one noticed it, which resulted in the tract being opened for settlement, and removed from the Tribe's jurisdiction.

The need for protection of the Pine Ridge Indians from the liquor peddlers in Nebraska still exists today, to which the grisly modern statistics of highway deaths, spousal and child abuse, crimes of theft and murder, and rampant alcoholism graphically attest. In these modern times, drunken killings still persist, as well as thievery of items sold to the liquor stores in exchange for alcohol, along with spousal and child abuse, all of which are directly attributable to the alcoholism enabled by the White Clay liquor stores. It is legacy of shame that no one in authority wants to put an end to. Despite an ongoing campaign by Nebraskans for Peace, as well as by activist Indians, state of Nebraska officials seem to believe that there's nothing wrong with a small village of 24 people being allowed to have four liquor stores that sell millions of dollars worth of alcoholic beverages each year to Indian alcoholics.

President Roosevelt's illegal Executive Order can be overruled by any current president signing another Order, which would transfer jurisdiction over the buffer zone back to the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Under U.S. Supreme Court law, the Oglala Sioux Tribe would then have only regulatory jurisdiction over whiskey sales in White Clay, but not criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians residing within the buffer zone.

During Bill Clinton's last year in office, I tried to get him to sign such an Executive Order, overruling that of President Roosevelt's. It was reported to me by his staff that there were a number of meetings held on the question between the Interior Department, the Justice Department and the White House Counsel's office, but with no ultimate result. Eventually, after I tried calling Vice President Gore to see what he could do on this matter, a member of the White House staff called me back and said that President Clinton would not sign such an Order because he did not want to set a bad precedent. That was about the same time he was busy selling pardons in his last days in office. I thought about the response back then by Clinton's staff during the 2008 Democratic primary campaign in South Dakota, when Bill, Hillary and Chelsea were practically living on the South Dakota Indian Reservations, promising to do great things for the Indians if elected.

Officials seem to believe that there's nothing wrong with a village of 24 people being allowed to have four liquor stores that sell millions of dollars worth of alcoholic beverages each year to Indian alcoholics.

After George W. Bush was sworn into office in 2001, I called Vice President Cheney, asking him to recommend that the president overrule President Roosevelt's 1904 Order. Saying he didn't understand the legalities, he referred me to the White House Counsel, a lawyer named Albert Gonzales. After sending Mr. Gonzales all the historical information and legal research I had collected, and asking that the Executive Order be overturned by President Bush, Mr. Gonzales wrote that he did not want to take away the land from the non-Indians who now owned it. I wrote back, telling him he had misunderstood the law, which states that no land would be transferred, but only jurisdiction would go to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, which already has in place a ban on Reservation liquor sales. It would be a repeat of the 50-square-mile buffer zone that prevented liquor sales to Indians over a century ago. Beyond that, I explained, the Tribe would not have criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians, only regulatory jurisdiction over the liquor licenses. Mr. Gonzales never bothered to respond.

Nebraskans for Peace is still campaigning. The group has just completed a film on the White Clay issue, which they hope will help draw attention to the immorality of the situation. Indian activists, including Russell Means, have tried establishing checkpoints at the border to stop the flow of beer and wine, but they get little cooperation from the Tribal police, and none from Nebraska authorities.

I attribute the politicians' lack of interest in the Indians' problems with whiskey peddlers in White Clay to the Indians' lack of money. I have no doubt that, if the Tribe and its member Indians were rich and powerful, there would be presidents, senators and congressmen knocking at their door, wanting to do something for them.

But, obviously, it is poverty that is keeping the Indians poor … and exploited. **CP**

James G. Abourezk is a practicing lawyer in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He is a former U.S. senator from South Dakota, and was chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs from 1975 to 1979. He authored legislation, and chaired the congressionally-created American Indian Policy Review Commission during its two-year life. He was born and raised on what was then the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He can be reached at georgepatton@alyajames.net.

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in elections for seats in Congress. It had held one such stronghold for 33 years, another for 22 years, while the outgoing candidate in the third polled 66 per cent of the vote in the previous election.

Life is getting harder for most people. In Italy and Spain, they blame the euro. But the cost of food in Britain is 15 per cent higher than a year ago. In the U.S.A., the price of eggs has risen by 30 per cent in the past year, milk and tomatoes by 15 per cent, rice, pasta and bread by 12 per cent. Rising accommodation costs and energy bills make matters worse.

Renewed growth, if and when it happens, will not solve the problem. Former U.S. treasury secretary, Lawrence Summers, recently reversed the famous 1953 dictum, "what's good for General Motors is good for the country," admitting that there was "a growing recognition by workers that what was good for the global economy and its business champions was not necessarily good for them." The reason for this volte-face? "A decoupling of the interests of business and nations may be inevitable" .

Inevitable, but not unexpected. Stagnation or a decline in purchasing power was the natural result of political choices taken after a war on workers, in the good cause of increasing competitiveness and reducing the cost of labor.

Economist Alain Cotta recalls that, with the end of index-linked wages in France in 1982, "the Socialists did private enterprise the biggest flavor it had ever had from the public authorities." Jacques Delors, minister of finance at the time, was delighted: "We have got rid of index-linking without a strike".Has Europe learned a lesson? German workers went on strike in March, British teachers in April, Greek truck drivers and French fishermen in May.

For those who can't or won't see that the source of the current problems over living standards is a decline in earned income as a proportion of national wealth, there are plenty of alternative solutions available. More supermarkets, as Sarkozy suggests, to "increase competition between distributors." More "sacrifices," so that increases in the price of food and energy will be absorbed by wage earners. This would help the European Central Bank to achieve its great objective (2 per cent inflation) and improve the purchasing power of its wealthy customers.

As for the rest, they can make a little go a long way and "eat well without spending too much," like the miser in Molière's play.

That is what Robert Rochefort, director of the Center for Research on Living Conditions (CREDOC) suggests: "Consumers must learn to optimize their budgets. They are already quite good at doing this. But they must learn not to complain, to accept the fact that purchasing power is gradually becoming a more qualitative concept, a power to decide between different items of expenditure, a power to choose one's purchases." A sociologist agrees: "There is a range of tariffs for telephone calls. This also applies to rent: one can always find somewhere cheaper to live."

Work longer, live less well. It is clear where we are going, unless we follow a 40-year-old precedent and decide to call a halt. **CP**

Serge Halimi is the executive director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

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